

# Jacob

Read Genesis 25-38

Just as the blessing and promise of God passed from Abraham to Isaac, it had to pass from Isaac to one of his sons. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, had twin sons: Esau and Jacob. Because Esau emerged from the womb first, the birthright and blessing rightfully belonged to him.

## Talking Points

- Isaac had two sons, unidentical twins.
- Jacob wrestled with his sin and identity for most of his life. With his brother, with Laban, and with God.
- During one long night, God brought Jacob to the end of himself. God changed Jacob's heart and his name to Israel during that encounter.

## Background

Jacob managed to obtain the birthright from his careless brother through trade. Later, he conspired with his mother to steal his father's blessing from Esau. Realizing how Jacob now had everything that could have belonged to him, Esau became committed to killing him.

Having blessed Jacob, Isaac sent him to Haran to find a wife from among the daughters of Laban, Rebekah's brother. While on the way, Jacob stopped for a night to sleep and had a vision. Jacob saw the Lord standing at the top of a ladder, stretching into heaven. In this dramatic way, the God of Abraham and Isaac spoke to Jacob and reaffirmed the covenantal promise made to them. The promise would now extend through Jacob to his sons. Through them, God's blessing would be available to the whole world.

### Striving For Prosperity

In Laban's house, Jacob met Rachel. He loved her deeply and agreed to work for Laban for seven years for the right to marry her. However, Laban deceived Jacob after seven years by giving him Leah, his older daughter, on the wedding night. It was the practice at that time that the older daughter must be married first. Because of his great desire for Rachel, Jacob then agreed to work another seven years for Laban to marry Rachel.

In a bitter rivalry to produce heirs for Jacob, the two sisters each gave Jacob their handmaidens as his concubines to raise sons in their place. From these four women, twelve sons were eventually born to Jacob. Rachel, the love of Jacob's life, was barren until ten sons had already been born. Then Rachel conceived and bore a child. Joseph was Jacob's favorite!

After Joseph was born, Jacob decided to leave Laban and return to the land of his birth, the land unconditionally given to Abraham and Isaac's descendants before him. Word of his return reached Esau's ears. He assembled 400 men to meet Jacob at the Promised

Land's border, the land that now belonged to his brother. Gripped by fear of his brother, Joseph strategically divided his family and flocks and sent them ahead of him into that land.

### **Striving No More**

The night before he was to arrive, Jacob encountered the Angel of the Lord. They wrestled together all night long. Before the night was through, the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means "wrestles with God." Yielding to God's will for his life, the two brothers were restored, despite their past. May it be so again!

## **Bible Conversations & Questions**

- Think about the various stages of Jacob's life. Make a list of Jacob's character qualities, both good and bad.
- Did Jacob deserve what happened to him in Laban's house? Explain your answer.
- What less-than-admirable family traits exist in your family tree? Consider what action you will take to ensure these traits are not passed down to future generations.